

Chesterfield County, Virginia

# **Preventing Sewage Backups**



**Important Answers to  
Your Questions From  
Chesterfield County  
Department of Utilities**

**804-748-1310**



## **How could a sewage backup affect me?**

An overflow in a sewage line generally results from a blockage in the line, causing the sewage to back up into nearby pipes and drains. Blockages can occur in the main sewer lines outside your home, as well as within your home or office plumbing system.

If the backup occurs in a public county-maintained line, the sewage normally will overflow out of the lowest possible opening, which is usually a manhole. However, in some homes, especially those with basements or where the lowest level has the same elevation as the sewer lines, the overflowing sewage may exit through lower drains and toilets.

## **What causes sewage backups?**

In home and office plumbing systems, the main cause is accumulation of grease, hair and other solid materials. Also, many items that are too large for sewage pipes to handle, such as disposable diapers and sanitary napkins, often are flushed down toilets. All of these items can cause major backups with both private and public sewer lines.

The greatest cause of sewage blockages within the county system, however, is vandalism. Leaves, sticks, rocks, bricks and trash have been found stuffed down manholes.

## **What can I do to help?**

Call the Chesterfield County Utilities Department immediately if you notice any cases of vandalism to sewer lines or manholes, so that the debris can be removed before it causes a backup.

Avoid putting grease down your garbage disposal or any household drain. Not only could it accumulate in county lines, it could also build up in your own system and eventually require the services of a plumber.

Never put disposable diapers or sanitary napkins down the toilet. These were not meant to be disposed of in this manner. Besides stopping up lines, they could damage your plumbing system.

## **Is there anything I can do to reduce the possibility of sewage backing up into my home?**

If the lowest level of your home or office is above ground level, it is unlikely that you will ever have a problem with overflows from county sewage lines. However, if the lowest level is below ground level, there is a possibility that

you may one day be affected by a backup.

Normally, if a blockage occurs in your neighborhood's main sewage line, only the lowest level drains and toilets will be affected. A common exit point for backed-up sewage is floor drains located in basements.

One way to prevent sewage from backing up at these locations is to install a backflow valve on a the lowest drain. For floor drains, a plumber's test plug can be used to close the drain when not in use. For more information about these items and other preventative measures, contact a plumber or your local plumbing-supply dealer.

## **What should I do if sewage backs up into my home?**

Keeping in mind that ceramic plumbing fixtures such as toilets are fragile, quickly close all drain openings with stoppers or plugs. Tub, sink and floor drains may need additional weight to keep them sealed. A string mop can be used to help plug toilets.

If you suspect the stoppage is in your home plumbing system, do not run water down your drains until the blockage is cleared.

A quick check with several nearby neighbors will help you determine if the blockage is widespread or if it is limited to your home.

If the backup appears to be in your neighborhood's main line, call Chesterfield County Utilities at the number listed on this brochure.

## **What does Chesterfield County do to prevent sewage backups?**

Chesterfield County makes every attempt to prevent backups in the public sewage system before they occur. Sewer lines are specifically designed to prevent accumulation and blockages.

In addition, utility maintenance crews inspect and clean sewage lines daily throughout the county. These lines are examined using high-tech video equipment that enables workers to see inside the pipelines.

Even with the county's extensive maintenance program, backups often are beyond the control of the Utilities Department. Fortunately, they don't happen often. Fortunately, they don't happen often. Only on rare occasions has the sewage actually backed up into a home.

## **Will my insurance cover any damages resulting from sewage backups?**

In the majority of cases, a special rider is needed on your homeowner's or renter's insurance policy to cover damages related to sewage backups or water damage. This optional coverage is generally inexpensive. However, you usually must request it, as



it is not automatically included in most policies. Customers whose homes may be vulnerable to backups, such as those with lower levels below the ground, are especially advised to investigate this option.

Like the majority of municipalities throughout the country, Chesterfield County does not assume financial liability for damages resulting from sewage backups, since most blockages are related to conditions that are beyond the county's control. This is why it is important to verify that your home is adequately insured.

### **Whom should I call to report a sewage backup?**

Emergency crews from Chesterfield County Utilities are on call 24 hours a day to assist you.

In an emergency such as a sewage line backup, contact the department at:

- 804-748-1310 Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m.- 4 p.m.
- 744-1360 after hours and on weekends or holidays
- 768-0140 toll free for the southern part of county



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804-748-1310

TDD Number for the Hearing Impaired: 711  
Para asistencia en español, teléfono 804-748-1291.

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